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Secondary Art and the Two-Story House: Kuwabara Takeo and the Comparative Imagination in Midcentury Japan, 1935-1947*

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Abstract

This article focuses on the life and ideas of Kuwabara Takeo, a cultural critic and scholar of French literature who became renowned for his 1946 critique of haiku as a “secondary art” in comparison with the novel. By reconstructing Kuwabara’s intellectual trajectory from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, I show how this famous essay was in part an effort to respond to Karl Löwith’s famous critique of Japanese intellectuals. Löwith argued Japanese intellectuals were insufficiently critical towards their own culture, due to the way that they compartmentalized practices and ideas associated with either Japanese culture or Western civilization. Kuwabara resisted such tendencies through the practice of cross-cultural comparison. His work gained encouragement from and responded to Löwith’s critique in a way that illuminates the role comparisons played in the intellectual culture of mid-twentieth century Japan.

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From 1936 to 1941, the German-Jewish philosopher Karl Löwith (1897-1973) lived in exile from the Nazi regime in northeastern Japan, where he was invited to take up a position as a visiting lecturer at Tōhoku Imperial University. In 1940, a Japanese translation of his essay “European Nihilism” appeared in three parts in the journal *Shisō*. Subtitled “Reflections on the Historical and Spiritual Background of the European War,” the essay conveyed a philosophical history of the disintegration of European unity since the end of the Napoleonic Wars and culminated in a critique of Martin Heidegger’s infamous 1933 rectoral address at Freiburg University. At the end of the final installment, Löwith issued a challenge to his hosts before leaving Japan after war broke out with the United States the following year. His “Afterword to Japanese Readers” was intended to preempt celebration on the part of an imagined audience of readers in wartime Japan who might rejoice at Löwith’s narrative of European decline. In it, he conveyed what would become a famous generalization about Japanese intellectuals: “They live as if on two levels: a lower, more fundamental one, on which they think in a Japanese way; and a higher one, on which the European sciences from Plato to Heidegger are lined up. And the European teacher asks himself: where is the step on which they pass from one level to the other?” Löwith suggested that a form of compartmentalization – likened to a two-story house with no staircase – perpetuated patriotic “self-love” among Japanese intellectuals and prevented them from channeling the “spirit of critique” in the manner of great European thinkers.¹

Löwith was not the first thinker to problematize the relationship between European learning and the “Japanese way” of thinking and feeling in this way; but due to his timing, context, and directness, his afterword played a significant role in framing debates about the future of Japanese culture well into

¹ Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism* (New York, 1995), 232.

the postwar period.² Even before the war ended, the phrase “two-story house” (nikai-date no ie) became shorthand in Japan for the ineffectiveness of Japanese intellectuals immersed in European thought, and it has long been tempting to interpret the outpouring of criticism by Japanese intellectuals toward Japanese culture in the war’s aftermath as – at least in part – a response to Löwith. Scholarship that provides some backing for this interpretation has focused on intellectual historians – namely Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) – and philosophers associated with the Kyoto School who were, like Löwith, former students of Martin Heidegger. Löwith’s afterword encouraged Maruyama to frame his study of intellectual history as a search for the underlying reasons why a modern, critical ethos had failed to take hold in Japan. Conversely, the Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani Keiji (1900-1990) mounted a defense of the very compartmentalization that Löwith criticized, arguing that it was more conducive to cross-cultural dialogue and understanding than a more encompassing appropriation of the European critical spirit would have been. These responses to Löwith’s afterword show how it could be construed as setting an agenda for research into the historical causes for the “incompleteness” of Japanese modernity, or as conveying a critique of

² The novelist Mori Ōgai often appeared in Löwith’s writings on Japan as a patriotic foil for his criticism. Yet writing by another novelist, Natsume Sōseki, forms a better precedent for Löwith’s critical approach to Japanese culture. Sōseki’s 1914 lecture “My Individualism” could be read as a self-reflective effort to grapple with what Löwith later identified as the “two-story house” problem. Given the chronological framing of this article around the mid-twentieth century, it is worth noting that Sōseki’s writings on individualism were rediscovered by Shimizu Ikutarō in the mid-1930s, not long before Löwith’s arrival in Japan. Jay Rubin, “Sōseki on Individualism: ‘Watakushi no Kojinshugi’” *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1979), 21-48.

philosophical efforts to “overcome” an ostensibly Eurocentric concept of modernity during the war.³

Less well known is the fact that Löwith’s impact extended beyond the field of philosophy and into the realm of postwar literary and cultural criticism. This is apparent in the work of Kuwabara Takeo, a scholar of French literature who became famous for his sweeping postwar critique of haiku as a “secondary art.” He happened to join the faculty of Tōhoku Imperial University in 1941, the same year Löwith left the university for the United States. Kuwabara was hired by his former high school French teacher Kōno Yoichi (1896-1984), the professor of philosophy at Tōhoku who had invited Löwith to lecture on German philosophy and literature at the university in 1936.⁴ Although Kuwabara never met Löwith in person, he read “European Nihilism” soon after arriving back in Japan after studying abroad in France from 1937 to 1939. When Löwith’s three-part essay was republished as a book after the war, Kuwabara wrote of his initial encounter with his work in the final lines of a review:

Finally, if I might be permitted to speak of a personal matter, while the author of this review was studying abroad in Europe, I became aware of the need to reform the usual manner in which

³ See Satō Rui, *Murayama Masao to Kāru Rēvitto* (Tokyo, 2003), Andrew Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan* (California, 2004), 213-215, Bret W. Davis, “Dialogue and Appropriation: The Kyoto School as Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School* edited by Bret W. Davis et. al (Bloomington, 2011), 33-47.

⁴ On Kōno’s relationship with Löwith, see Kōno Yoichi, *Zoku gakumon no magariado* (Tokyo, 1986), 212-220.

European culture was transplanted (inyū) to Japan. I strove to press this point with the meager strength of my pen when I returned home, and I am still unable to forget the encouragement I received upon reading his essays soon after I arrived. Recognizing that I am an amateur, and believing that this book will in fact be of most benefit to amateurs, I took up my pen to write this review – as requested – out of a quiet feeling of gratitude.⁵

Set in the context of Kuwabara's postwar career, this tribute to Löwith is surprising. After the war Kuwabara was consistently critical of sweeping pronouncements about Japanese culture made by Europeans who spent time in the country yet were not proficient in the Japanese language. While Kuwabara became known as an optimistic advocate of science, progress, and modernization, Löwith remained skeptical of the idea of generalized progress as a secularized form of religious eschatology. Kuwabara was an intellectual popularizer who wrote provocative and often lighthearted essays rather than philosophical treatises or sweeping historical surveys like Löwith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche*. Indeed, Kuwabara's self-proclaimed "amateurism" is often cited as the reason for the neglect of his work among intellectual historians in comparison with the philosophers and historians who responded to Löwith's critique of Japanese intellectuals.

This scholarly neglect is unfortunate, for Kuwabara's stylistic decisions and eclectic choice of subject matter were part of an original effort to respond to the "two-story house" problem of intellectual compartmentalization. This response took the form of a series of timely cross-cultural comparisons; involving Japan, China, the United States and France; that disrupted Löwith's equation of the East

⁵ Kuwabara Takeo, "Yōroppa no nihirzumu" in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo, 1969), 436 (original from Nov. 1948, place of publication unknown).

with tradition and the West with modernity. For Kuwabara, declaring an aspect of Japanese culture incomparable would have meant sheltering it from criticism. Comparisons across national boundaries exposed the producers of culture to international competition.⁶ This was particularly true of the famous article that catapulted Kuwabara to public prominence after the Second World War, in which he argued that contemporary haiku was a mere “secondary art” (*dai-ni geijutsu*) in comparison with the “primary art” of the novel.

By honing in on Kuwabara’s practice of comparison from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, I intend to cast his amateurism and dilettantism in a new light, as an enabling condition for efforts to bring together separated disciplines and regional specializations within a common comparative frame. I derive inspiration here from criticism of comparative approaches to history and literature advanced by proponents of *histoire croisée* and world literature. According to such critiques, comparisons lack objectivity vis-à-vis the objects compared and are haunted by a “spectre of amateurism.”⁷ Yet the reception of Kuwabara’s work suggests that these scholarly weaknesses were strengths in the domain where his work had the greatest impact – that of cultural criticism. This domain thrived on the heated debate generated by comparisons across boundaries of genre, academic discipline, and culture.

⁶ On essentialism and competition among cultural mediators, see Christian Tasgold, *Spaces in Translation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 88.

⁷ Michael Werner and Benedicte Zimmerman, “Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity” *History and Theory*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Feb. 2006), 30-50. David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, 2003), 284-285.

Many of these provocative acts of comparison presupposed the existence of what J. Thomas Rimer referred to as a “curious kind of dual track of cultural production” in Japan.⁸ One track was associated with newly codified – if not entirely invented – Japanese traditions; such as haiku poetry, Nihonga-style painting, and gagaku court music. The other, generally more prestigious, track was associated with so-called “imported ideas” from the West. This second track included such high cultural pursuits as free-verse poetry, postimpressionist painting, and Western classical music. The relative autonomy of these two tracks formed the condition for repeated disagreement, fueled by comparisons and juxtapositions, over the precise relationship between them. Should the two tracks be conceived in hierarchical or relativist terms? Could an overarching system of artistic standards encompass them both?

Rimer waded into this field of disagreement when he suggested that the bifurcation of the world of high culture into two tracks impeded the creation of socially and politically-relevant works of art and literature. As he put it, “High culture did not always bite deep enough into the realities of the society that created it.”⁹ Without arguing for the superiority of either track, Rimer implicitly aligned himself with a controversial tradition of cultural criticism that included Löwith’s critique of the “two-story house” and Kuwabara’s critique of “secondary art.” In doing so, he put his finger on the long-standing comparative dimension of debate and disagreement surrounding the proper relationship among culture, politics, and society in Japan.

⁸ J. Thomas Rimer, “High Culture in the Shōwa Period” *Daedalus*, Vol. 119, No. 3 (Summer, 1990), 268.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 269.

As in Rimer's case, such comparisons tended to operate on two levels simultaneously. First, they brought Japanese cultural producers together with their foreign counterparts, who were assumed to create work that was more socially and politically relevant to its local context. The underlying reasons for this depended on the "track" in question, with the ostensibly foreign origins of certain genres blamed in some cases and traditional generic conventions blamed in others. Second, comparisons brought Japanese producers of "Western culture" together with Japanese producers of "Japanese culture" – as more or less progressive, imitative, or culturally authentic. Whatever the case, the doubled lens through which Japanese cultural producers and their work was viewed facilitated wide-ranging debate and disagreement. This comparative optic enabled critics to move seamlessly between comparisons within Japan to comparisons across different national contexts.

Comparisons were a means by which critics debated the role of art in society, and insofar as these comparisons required critics to transgress the specialized boundaries associated with the dual-track system of cultural production, they were typically conveyed in the register of dilettantism. I want to suggest that this specific mode of comparison merits further investigation from intellectual historians specializing in other times and places, particularly outside Western Europe, where other "multi-track" systems of cultural production prevailed. This mode of comparison falls somewhere between the ambit of critical genealogies of the comparative method that focus on academic disciplines – such as those associated with Orientalist scholarship – and more wide-ranging and diffuse accounts of the role played by comparisons in the construction of otherness beyond the academy.¹⁰

¹⁰ For an exemplary recent example of the former approach to comparison, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago, 2005).

Historians have done much to illuminate how cross-national comparisons were constitutive of, rather than simply predicated upon, individual nations and cultures. They have shown how the defining characteristics of particular nations, cultures, and civilizations were codified and made available for performance and reproduction through comparisons made by writers, travelers, colonial officials, and social scientists in a wide variety of historical contexts.¹¹ They have however paid less attention to what the linguist Osamu Sawada calls “the pragmatics of comparison,” the study of how explicit acts of comparison actually intervene in debates over the standards by which the objects under discussion are related to each other.¹² To examine the work performed by comparisons in a historically rigorous way, it is necessary to attend to the particular dynamics of fields of cultural and literary criticism that played a central role in maintaining standards and

¹¹ The work of Benedict Anderson is a common reference point for much of the literature on comparison written by historians. For an elaboration of his approach, see Glenda Sluga, “The Nation and the Comparative Imagination” in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, edited by Deborah Cohen and Maura O’ Connor (Abington: Routledge, 2004). A wealth of critical perspectives on Anderson’s approach to comparison and the nation-state can be found in Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler eds., *Grounds of Comparison, Around the Work of Benedict Anderson* (Abington: Routledge, 2013). An important demonstration of an approach to the history of comparisons that avoids the trap of nationalist teleology is Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹² Sawada Osamu, “Pragmatic aspects of implicit comparison: An economy-based approach” *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 41, no. 6 (June 2009) 1079-1103.

patrolling generic boundaries.¹³ It is with this pragmatic problematic in mind – summed up by the question “what do comparisons do?” – that I approach Kuwabara’s career as a cultural critic.

Reading Kuwabara’s work as one of many efforts to respond to Löwith’s wartime critique of intellectual compartmentalization makes it possible to ground the comparative dimension of his work in a broad critical turn against different expressions of traditional culture in Japan after World War Two. For example, whereas the intellectual historian Maruyama Masao fleshed out the historical background to Löwith’s critique through academic studies of thinkers active during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, Kuwabara could be understood as playfully occupying the standpoint of the ancient Greeks within Löwith’s critique. Citing the cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt, Löwith proclaimed the Greeks had “panoramic eyes” that enabled them to grasp “the objective, concrete view of the world and oneself that can make comparisons and distinctions and that recognizes oneself in others.”¹⁴ This evokes Kuwabara’s broad-brush comparisons of different aspects of European, American, and Chinese culture with their Japanese counterparts. The comparative dimension of Kuwabara’s sweepingly dismissive postwar essay on the artistic status of haiku poetry can be understood as part of an effort to refute Löwith’s assertion that Japanese intellectuals “do not make distinctions or comparisons between European concepts such as will, freedom, and spirit and what corresponds to these in their own lives, thinking, and speaking; or to put it more precisely they

¹³ Japanese literary scholars have been more attentive to the different roles played by comparisons within these fields, particularly those that involve France and Japan. See Rachel Hutchinson, *Nagai Kafu’s Occidentalism: Defining the Japanese Self* (Albany, 2011) and Doug Slaymaker ed., *Confluences: Postwar Japan and France* (Ann Arbor, 2002).

¹⁴ Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism* (New York, 1995), 232.

avoid doing this.”¹⁵ Though spectacularly controversial, his refutation was just one among many different attempts to embed art, literature, and poetry more deeply in social and political reality during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

In what follows, I explore Kuwabara’s comparative practice and his scattered critical reflections upon that practice, showing how it was informed by broader developments in domains of literary scholarship and cultural criticism. I begin with Kuwabara’s intellectual formation and one of his first pieces of cultural criticism, a review of a 1935 exhibition of work by the literati painter Tomioka Tessai. This work provides evidence of Kuwabara’s critical awareness of the problematic nature of situating Japan within a comparative framework that emphasizes a stark East/West binary. I then turn to Kuwabara’s wartime writing on Japan, France, and the United States. Here Kuwabara responded to Löwith’s critique by reframing the “two-story house” problem of intellectual compartmentalization as one that concerned different experiences of modernity associated with mass culture and intellectual culture. Finally, I situate Kuwabara’s famous postwar critique of traditional Japanese poetry in relation to his other writing from across the war that responds to Löwith’s critique. Attention to the comparative dimension of Kuwabara’s work here reveals the connection between midcentury cultural criticism and efforts to reimagine Japan as a post-imperial “nation of culture” (*bunka kokka*) that would need to achieve international recognition in fields of art, literature, poetry rather than military or imperialist competition.

Kuwabara was born in 1904 in Tsuruga, a coastal city in Fukui prefecture 75 kilometers northeast of Kyoto. He was the son of Kuwabara Jitsuzō (1871-1931), a prominent Sinologist at Kyoto Imperial

¹⁵ Ibid., 232.

University. Under the leadership of the journalist-turned-academic Naitō Konan (1866-1933), the university became an internationally-recognized center for Sinology during the first three decades of twentieth century.¹⁶ Kuwabara was surrounded by Naitō and other prominent scholars of China throughout his early years. He was encouraged to study French literature by Naitō and Kano Naoki (1868-1947), a professor of Chinese literature and philosophy who considered France and China alike in conceiving of national belonging in primarily cultural, rather than ethnic, terms.¹⁷ Kuwabara thus absorbed a nuanced and confident understanding of Chinese culture early on, and his familiarity with separated bodies of scholarship on China and France made him particularly receptive to Löwith's critique of intellectual compartmentalization.

This confidence was on display in one of his earliest works of cultural criticism with a comparative thrust, a review of a posthumous exhibition of calligraphy and painting by the Japanese painter Tomioka Tessai (1837-1924) at the Kyoto Imperial Museum in 1935. Tessai's chosen genre of Chinese-style literati painting (*nanga* or *bunjinga*) was dismissed as anachronistic and derivative during the latter half of the nineteenth century, part of a broader turn against "Chinese learning" in Japan.¹⁸

¹⁶ On the Kyoto School of sinology, see Stefan Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, 1995) and Joshua Vogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Konan* (New York, 1980).

¹⁷ *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 4 (Tokyo, 1968), 21.

¹⁸ Okuhara Seiko, "A Case of Funpon Training in Late Edo Literati Painting" in *Coping the Master and Stealing his Secrets*, edited by Brenda Jordan and Victoria Weston (Honolulu, 2003), 142-143. Christine M. E. Guth, "Meiji Response to *Bunjinga*," in *Challenging Past and Presence: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth Century Japanese Art*, ed. Ellen P. Conant (Honolulu, 2006), 177-196.

Kuwabara's review contributed to a broader reevaluation Tessai's work. The review ended with a critical reflection upon the comparative frame in which his work ought to be situated:

I am generally quite unconvinced by efforts to define East Asian beauty through concepts such as “senescent reclusion” (rōkyō) or “withered beauty” (kotan). On the contrary, I sense a lustrous side to Chinese art. In our own country too, what strikes us first is the youthfulness of painters like Tessai. Though they evidence composure, there is something fundamentally vigorous and willful about them, and this has no relation whatsoever to such things as “graceful, haiku-esque imperfection” (haikai-teki sabi). Rather, to the extent that they rely upon their individual style to compose autonomous dream worlds (jiko no kōi-teki musō), they seem to move in the same direction as the great novelists of the West. Even if one acknowledges their Eastern decorum, it is daring and active, with a greatness that goes so far as to subsume things Western. Many attempts have been made in recent years to determine the character of the East or of Japan, but one must not diminish oneself to facilitate a hasty argument. This is because if one collects the accessible facts and works that conform well to such determinations, one risks the possibility that only one aspect of a truly great work – the aspect convenient to one's argument – will be visible. We would do better to search for great works that do not conform to such determinations, and then come to view ourselves from the standpoint of possibility.¹⁹

¹⁹ Kuwabara Takeo, “Tomiooka Tessai-ten o mite” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū* (Tokyo, 1968) 157 (originally in Sept. 1935 issue of *Kogito*).

Three recurring features of Kuwabara's comparative practice were visible in this early piece of writing. First, comparison served as a means to draw upon critical standards from across boundaries of genre and culture. Earlier in the review he seized upon the resemblance of Rong Qiqi, a bearded recluse depicted in one of Tessai's paintings, to Tolstoy as an occasion to pontificate upon the rich "inner life" (*naimen seikatsu*) that enabled great artists and novelists working within different traditions to create the "autonomous dream-worlds" (*jiko no kōi-teki musō*) mentioned in the above quote.²⁰ Here Kuwabara invoked the same standard he had applied to the work of the French novelist Stendhal three years earlier, in an article aimed at garnering support for his new translation of *The Red and The Black* into Japanese in 1932.²¹ Kuwabara associated the realist novel – and great works of art in general – with the creation of autonomous fictional worlds.²²

Second, the flipside of Kuwabara's boundary-crossing criticism was an aversion to aesthetic concepts that impeded its practice. While he did not shy away from making sweeping comparisons that involved "the East" and "the West," he was skeptical of contemporary efforts to systematize

²⁰ Ibid, 156.

²¹ Kuwabara Takeo, "Sutandāru no geijutsu ni tsuite" in *Kuwabara Takeo Zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1969), 141-159 (originally in May 1932 issue of *Shisō*).

²² Jacques Ranciere's conceptualization of the relationship between literature and politics bears some resemblance with Kuwabara's positing of a close relationship between literary autonomy and realism. The presumed autonomy of literature as a "definite practice of writing" is what enables it to engage in a particular form of politics concerned with the "partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world." Jacques Ranciere, "The Politics of Literature" *SubStance*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2004), 10.

Eastern and Western aesthetics into separate yet comparable conceptual systems, in part because he believed they took Western masterpieces as the starting point for constructing an Asian analogue.²³ These conceptual systems proliferated against the backdrop of rising nationalism in the 1930s, as scholars of Japanese art and culture pushed back against encroachments into their specialized domain by prominent scholars of Western philosophy and literature, such as the critic Kobayashi Hideo (1902-1983) and the philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960).²⁴ In essays, travelogues, and philosophical treatises; Kobayashi and Watsuji brought their extensive background in Western scholarship and culture to bear upon traditional Japanese art and culture. But whereas the comparative approach of Kobayashi and Watsuji was primarily hermeneutical and particularizing, Kuwabara's approach was analytical and universalistic. Kobayashi and Watsuji thus tended to use East/West comparisons to elaborate upon the distinctiveness of East Asian concepts like *mujō* (evanescence) and *fūdo* (climate) as part of a separate yet ostensibly equal philosophical or aesthetic system.²⁵ In contrast, Kuwabara flatly dismissed the application of difficult-to-translate concepts

²³ Kuwabara Takeo, "Tōno mongatari kara" in *Kuwabara Takeo Zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo, 1968), 167-168 (originally July 1937 issue of *Bungakukai*). On Kuwabara's avoidance of Japanese aesthetic concepts in his later work see, Oura Yasusuke, "*Bungaku riron no kenkyū o yomu*" *Jinbun gakuho* (Mar 2011), 133-134.

²⁴ Hamashita Masahiro, "Kokubungaku kara no bigaku: kokugaku kara Okazaki Yoshie 'Nihon bungeigaku' no seisei made" *Bungeigaku kenkyū* (March 2007), 1-16.

²⁵ In its frequent comparisons between Greece and Japan, Watsuji's travelogue *Koji junrei* (1919) serves as a representative work for this genre of art criticism, which he continued to explore in a chapter of his well-known *Fūdo* (1935). *Koji Junrei* was translated by Hiroshi Nara as *Pilgrimages to Ancient Temples in Nara: Koji junrei* (Portland, 2013). *Fūdo* was translated by Geoffery Bownas as *A*

associated with Japanese and Chinese aesthetics; such as *sabi* (graceful imperfection), *keotan* (withered elegance), and *rōkyō* (senescent reclusion); to Tessai's work. Kuwabara associated these terms with art criticism that threatened to trap Tessai's work within a comparative frame confined to the "East." On this point, Kuwabara's review was implicitly critical of the art historian Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913), who understood the history of Japanese art as part of "the history of Asiatic ideals – the beach where each successive wave of Eastern thought has left its sand-ripple as it beat against the national consciousness."²⁶ For Kuwabara, focusing on the succession of Asiatic ideals led critics to overlook the exceptional qualities of Tessai's work.

Finally, comparison was a means to open up the eyes of readers to new possibilities for artistic and literary appreciation. In Kuwabara's non-specialized view, the exceptional qualities of Tessai's work come through more clearly in comparison with Western novelists than with other literati painters. This was not because Tessai had more in common with Western novelists than with his artistic peers. Rather, the juxtaposition of Tessai and Tolstoy was intended to sweep away ossified ideas of what "the art of the East" was supposed to look like. As Kuwabara put it decades later, "It goes without saying that Tessai was worshipped as the highest summit of literati painting. But what I was trying to do is to liberate him from the particularistic world of literati painting into a world of universals. This was not something I was interested in doing only for Tessai. It was my stance

Climate: A Philosophical Study (Tokyo, 1961). On Kobayashi's forays into Japanese tradition, see James Dorsey, *Critical Aesthetics: Kobayashi Hideo, Modernity, and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, 2009), 159-195.

²⁶ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London, 1905), 8-9.

Quoted in Kinoshita Nagahiro, "Okakura Kakuzō as a Historian of Art" *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, Vol. 24 (December 2012), 36.

toward literature and art in general.”²⁷ The individual autonomy and polysemy of great artistic creations undermined Orientalist efforts to determine the essential nature of “the East” on the basis of classic texts and particularistic aesthetic concepts. The alternative was openness to a more universalistic and encompassing concept of modernity, one that provided as much room for the possibility of “the East” assimilating “the West” to its artistic traditions as the converse.

Kuwabara’s review of the Tessai exhibition conveyed a critique of particularizing aesthetic concepts and promoted a more universalistic comparative framework for art appreciation. This helps explain why Kuwabara derived encouragement from Löwith’s critique of intellectual compartmentalization in the late thirties. Yet the criticism conveyed through the Tessai review and other writings from the late thirties and early forties was less totalizing than Löwith’s “two-story house.” This more moderate approach was evident in Kuwabara’s biographical portraits of writers and academics who came of age during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These short and appreciative pieces of writing suggested that they were exempt from Löwith’s scathing critique of the unreflective “self-love” evidenced by the novelist Mori Ōgai (1862-1922).²⁸ In comparison with Löwith, Kuwabara was far more appreciative of members of Ōgai’s generation, who were often grouped together as

²⁷ Kuwabara Takeo, “Jibatsu” in *Kuwabara Takeo shū* (Tokyo, 1980) 646.

²⁸ Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 229-231. Kuwabara’s biographical portraits are collected in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, Vol. 4 (Tokyo, 1968).

“the young men of Meiji,” a cohort that lived through the transformation of Japan into a modern imperial power during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁹

Kuwabara’s writing on Meiji intellectuals could be understood as a variation on a major theme in cultural criticism that arose well before the death of Emperor Meiji in 1912. In order to overcome problems at home and abroad, critics often called on their fellow countrymen to channel the enterprising spirit of the politicians, businessmen, and military leaders who remade Japan into a major imperial power over the course of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. A recurrent suggestion was that those who came of age in the lead up to or during the early years of the Meiji period could draw upon cultural resources, in the form of habits and ways of viewing the world, that were on the verge of vanishing in contemporary society. An avid mountaineer, Kuwabara valued youthful vigor, healthy confidence, and extroversion – all qualities associated with earlier idealizations of the Meiji generation.³⁰ Kuwabara’s affirmation of Meiji intellectuals explains why he sought to ground Löwith’s critique of intellectual compartmentalization in a later era – one less associated with “Westernization” in general than with the growth of an “Americanized” mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁹ Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths* (Princeton, 1985), 268- 275. Born in the 1830s, Tessai was actually an “old man of Tempō,” but his prolific career spanned generational divide associated with the “young men of Meiji,” who were born in the 1860s and 1870s.

³⁰ Kuwabara’s writings on mountaineering are collected in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 7 (Tokyo, 1969).

Kuwabara's acclamation of past thinkers was implicitly critical of the disciplinary effects of overspecialization. In book reviews and biographical portraits, Kuwabara suggested that older writers and academics who wrote about Japanese culture were relatively free of anxiety over the question of what was authentically Japanese – as opposed to Western or Chinese – compared with contemporary specialists in Japanese literature and culture. He argued that this allowed them to better apprehend a level of everyday reality that was bypassed by thinkers in search of a deeper cultural essence.

In 1937, Kuwabara made this point in an enthusiastic review of *The Legends of Tōno* (*Tōno monogatari*) by the folklorist and ethnographer Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962). Yanagita's work focused on the customs, dialects, and oral traditions of villages and farming communities in different regions of Japan. Historians have criticized Yanagita for pegging his representations of life in the countryside onto the essentialist and ahistorical figure of the "folk" (*jōmin*).³¹ Kuwabara focused instead on the messy and mysterious surface details that Yanagita transcribed yet left open to interpretation. These stimulated his imagination so much that he felt compelled to retrace Yanagita's steps across the Tōno valley in northeastern Japan in 1936 before leaving to study in Paris for the following two years.³²

³¹ Harry Harootunian, "Figuring the Folk: History, Poetics, and Representation," in *Mirror of Modernity*, ed. Stephen Vlastos (Berkeley, 1998), 144-159.

³² Kuwabara Takeo, "'Tōno monogatari' kara," 159-161.

As Kikuchi Akira has pointed out, Kuwabara frequently adopted the stance of an observant “fieldworker” in relation to the subjects he wrote about.³³ This was clearly influenced by Kuwabara’s reading of Yanagita, which he saw as compatible with other influences he absorbed during his study of French literature. For example, in his review of *The Legends of Tōno*, Kuwabara cited the French critic Alain (1868-1951) in reference to Yanagita’s ethnographic approach: “If you wish to learn of human nature, you must first strive to let what people say, whether absurd or not, remain in its naïve state. This is worth a hundred times the value of a plausible-seeming arrangement, from which you will draw no more than commonplaces.”³⁴ This was not only a statement about the relationship between transcriber and transcribed. The passage implied a particular relationship between the transcriber and a third-person, members of the reading public, whose expectations had to be treated with care. Kuwabara’s concern for this was evident in essays that recorded his experience living in Paris from 1937 to 1939, during which he translated and eventually met Alain. If Yanagita’s depictions of the countryside engaged with and subverted reader expectations that “irrational” folk beliefs must ultimately yield to rational explanation, then Kuwabara’s depictions of Paris engaged with and subverted expectations that readers projected

³³ Kikuchi Akira, “Kuwabara Takeo no Tōhoku” Keio University Press <http://www.keio-up.co.jp/kup/sp/jinbunken/0004.html> (accessed June 19, 2019).

³⁴ Ibid, 163. This is my translation of Kuwabara’s translation of Alain from French into Japanese. Kuwabara notably added the verb “strive” (*tsutomeru*), whereas the original does not mention any effort expended to preserve what people say in this state. “Dès que l'on veut s'instruire sur la nature humaine, ce qu'on dit, absurde ou non, doit être premièrement laissé dans son état naïf, qui vaut cent fois mieux qu'un arrangement vraisemblable, dont vous ne tirerez que des lieux communs.” Alain, *Les dieux* (Paris, 1934).

upon the city in order to reveal the degree to which those expectations were a source of – rather than simply a reflection of – the difference between France and Japan.

Since the turn of the century, accounts of life in Paris had made it out to be a paradise for artists and writers.³⁵ Rather than simply tear down this illusion, Kuwabara focused on what it implicitly excluded from consideration. He began one essay by exclaiming that the only thing his friends and colleagues in Japan were interested in was, “What are the French reading now?” What they were really interested in was the future of literature. What was fashionable today in Paris, the capital of the literary world, would spread to Japan tomorrow. Kuwabara decided he would simply take the question at face value and ask people he encountered in his daily life what they were reading. This revealed a wide range of different attitudes toward literature, which Kuwabara contextualized with reference to occupation and social class. He celebrated an old woman he met who recited Paul Valéry’s 1000-word poem “Le cimetière marin” by heart to him, but he encountered few people with time to keep up with the latest prize-winning novels.³⁶

It was however precisely this ignored aspect of social reality that explained the difference between the status of writers in Japan and France. Kuwabara argued that in France, the elevated status of writers was taken for granted by large numbers of people who were not interested in the latest

³⁵ J. Thomas Rimer, “Tokyo in Paris / Paris in Tokyo,” in *Paris in Japan*, ed. Shūji Takashina, J. Thomas Rimer, and Gerald Bolas (Tokyo and St. Louis, 1987). See also Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, 2004), 23-34.

³⁶ Kuwabara Takeo, “Bungaku-teki Furansu” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1969) 7 (originally published in *Bungei* in July 1939).

works of literature, and this contributed to the autonomy of the literary field.³⁷ This sociological fact was both a condition and an effect of writers intervening in politics and in some cases embarking upon successful political careers, as in the case of the diplomat-cum-dramatist Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944).³⁸ Conversely in Japan, critics sought to reproduce an idealized conception of a French cult of literature for literature's sake. This had the effect of estranging the world of writers and critics from disinterested members of the public, and it could make a turn from literature to politics seem like a kind of betrayal.³⁹

In Kuwabara's travel-writing on France, a well-established idealization of the world capital of literature yielded to a new, more qualified one – influenced in part by Stendhal's sociological realism and Yanagita's ethnographic technique – of the relationship between a few socially engaged intellectuals and a public that continued to believe in the need for them. But his overall impression was negative and deflationary: French literary culture was aloof and aristocratic, and it should not inspire envy in Japan. He was particularly annoyed by the fact that, whereas he had gone to study modern French literature and criticism, the French intellectuals he met only expressed an interest in the Japanese classics, such as the *Tale of the Genji* and the *Manyōshū*.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

³⁹ It is worth noting contemporary exceptions to this generalization included the successful careers of writer/politicians like Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933) and Tsurumi Yūsuke (1885-1973), whose moderate political views were not far off from Kuwabara's at the time.

⁴⁰ Kuwabara, "Bungaku-teki Furansu," 9-14.

In contrast to this, Kuwabara's impressions of visiting New York City for the first time in 1939, on his way back to Japan, were more positive. He was shown around the city by the Canadian historian of Japan E. H. Norman (1909-1957), and his impressions conveyed a different critique of Japanese intellectual culture by emphasizing the similarity between Japan and the United States:

I felt as if I had already returned to Japan. The food is sweet, exactly the flavor of so-called "European cuisine" in Japan. Salads are invariably topped with mayonnaise dressing. And then [words like] "building," "romance," "car," taste in clothes, café menus (non-existent in Paris – no one seeks out unusual things to drink), advertising, the annoying hustling and bustling of city-folk (hurriedly ascending an escalator is something one does not see in London, Paris, or Berlin), etc. etc. I realized everything "Western-style" in the daily life of Japan's cities today is actually American-style. That does not mean shallow or uncultured. I felt something vigorous and healthy in America, and I rather liked it. Yet in Japan, a world of European-style speculative thought sits on top of American-style everydayness, without any relations between the two. In order to think through the Japan of today one must look to America.⁴¹

Kuwabara's celebration of surface and materiality is reminiscent of modernist literature from the 1920s, but he ends on a polemical note aimed squarely at the growing tendency to align

⁴¹ Kuwabara Takeo, "Amerika jōriku" in *Kuwabara Takeo Zenshū*, vol. 6 (Tokyo, 1968), 120-121 (originally published in *Shiki* in January 1941).

modernism with a critique of the spread of “Americanism” throughout the world.⁴² Rather than blame American material culture and Hollywood movies for steamrolling cultural differences or enervating the national spirit, Kuwabara asserted that his experience in America revealed a “vigorous and healthy” aspect of everyday life in Japan’s cities that intellectuals – ironically immersed in the latest European critique of Western metaphysics – bypassed in search of an underlying cultural essence. In opposition to the well-worn travel-writing trope, this revelation was the result of similarity rather than difference between Japan and the United States. One response to this sameness would be to suggest that there had been no reason to visit New York in the first place, since the same everyday experience of modernity could have been had in Tokyo. Disenchantment with the homogenization of the modern world might sap one’s desire to travel and cause one to turn inward. On the contrary, Kuwabara suggested that travel abroad could reenchant everyday life at home and circumvent the desire to see beyond it in a search of a cultural essence.

Though Kuwabara’s brief experience of America was from 1939, his impressionistic recollection of that experience was not published until 1941, after he had returned to Japan and encountered Löwith’s critique of the “two-story house” inhabited by Japanese intellectuals. The final lines of this short essay transposed Löwith’s critique of the disconnected Japanese and European levels of this house (“a lower, more fundamental one, on which they feel and think in a Japanese way; and a higher one, on which the European sciences from Plato to Heidegger are lined up”) to one

⁴² On the relationship between modernism and anti-Americanism in Japan, see *Harry Harootunian, Overcome by Modernity* (Princeton, 2000), 48-50 and Roy Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture* (Berlin, 2001), 103-170.

focused on “European-style speculative thought” sitting atop “American-style everydayness.”⁴³ This shifted the grounds of Löwith’s sweeping criticism of Japan’s relationship with the West since the Meiji Restoration to more recent historical developments associated with the spread of “American-style” mass consumer culture during interwar period. It was also consistent with Kuwabara’s praise of Yanagita Kunio, Tomioka Tessai, and other exceptional individuals who came of age during or before the Meiji period. They all found ways of responding to the opportunities opened up by expanded contact with the West that seemed to at least partially exempt them from Löwith’s critique of intellectual compartmentalization.

In Kuwabara’s recollection of New York, Löwith’s critique of the relationship between Japanese tradition and European modernity became one centered on the relations between “American-style” mass culture and “European-style” intellectual culture in Japan. Kuwabara continued to criticize Japanese intellectuals’ immersion in European ideas after the war. He argued that as a result of the increasing division of academic labor, Japanese scholars of European literature increasingly focused on historical and cultural differences within Europe rather than those between Europe and Japan. They failed to grasp how these national differences were historically interrelated and produced through acts of comparison. Kuwabara suggested that overly “bookish” scholars conveyed the textual products of intra-European comparisons to Japan as objective facts, without bothering to check these texts against their own experience when they studied abroad.

⁴³ Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, 232.

Second-hand comparisons then began to mediate – and distort – the experiences of later students of literature and philosophy who traveled to Europe.⁴⁴

Kuwabara's 1947 essay "On Insight" (*Dōsatsu ni tsuite*) contained the most direct expression of what these bookish intellectuals ought to learn from Löwith. In this essay, Kuwabara cited Löwith's argument in "European Nihilism" that Proudhon, Burckhardt, and other great European thinkers of the nineteenth century foresaw the coming catastrophe of the twentieth century long before it became fashionable to speak of a "crisis of European civilization" after the First World War. He then criticized Japanese intellectuals for lacking the "temporally and spatially expansive, multi-dimensional insight" capable of anticipating the chaotic situation after war and defeat.⁴⁵ Kuwabara's most well-known response to this chaotic situation – written quickly in the war's immediate aftermath – came in the form of the essay that catapulted him to prominence as a cultural critic, "Secondary Art – On Contemporary Haiku" (1946).

To understand the genesis of this work, it is necessary to re-trace Kuwabara's movements across the end of the war. From 1943 to 1948, Kuwabara was an assistant professor of French literature at Tōhoku Imperial University in Sendai, the largest city in the region he felt compelled to visit after reading the work of Yanagita Kunio. Though Kuwabara did not openly oppose the war while at Tōhoku, he came to the defense of the study of Western literature on several occasions.

⁴⁴ Kuwabara Takeo, "Furansu-teki to iu koto" in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1969), 19-50 (originally published in *Gendai sekai bungaku kōza Furansu-ben* in 1949).

⁴⁵ Kuwabara Takeo, "Dōsatsu nit suite" in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo, 1968), 5-12 (originally published in *Techō* in March 1947).

He believed his field of expertise was threatened on two fronts – by officials who wanted to focus on practical studies directly relevant to the war effort and by neo-traditionalist academics who tried to reorient the curriculum toward the study of classical Japanese literature.⁴⁶ In one of his wartime articles from 1943, he pushed back against these opponents by extolling the practical relevance of French literature in connection with the building up of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, writing that, “in the case of a cultural embassy to the former French colony of Indochina, it would be much more effective to send a great scholar of French rather than one versed in the tea ceremony.”⁴⁷ Kuwabara was engaged in a struggle for limited resources with promoters of a radical “return to tradition” during the war, and he was not interested in an immediate truce when it was over. Indeed, he was the youngest faculty member to join the university committee that oversaw the US-ordered purge of “militarists and ultranationalists” among the Tōhoku faculty after the war ended.⁴⁸

Yet Kuwabara also directed criticism at lovers of French literature in Japan. He accused them of weeping over the fall of Paris when they should have been investigating the connections between French intellectual culture and France’s defeat. In a published lecture from 1944 that he had

⁴⁶ “Senjika no Tōhokudai bunkei keishi ni igi, gakunai chōsa Abe Jirō Kuwabara Takeo-ra hankotsu shimesu” *Tokyo Shimbum* (30 Apr 2017), 1.

⁴⁷ Kuwabara Takeo, “Gaikoku bungaku kenkyū e no hansei” in *Kuwabara Takeo shū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1980), 567-568 (originally published in *Kyoto teikoku daigaku shinbun* in 1943).

⁴⁸ The only successful purges occurred within Kuwabara’s division, law and letters. Three professors were purged. Tōhoku daigaku hyakunen-shi henshū iinkai, *Tōhoku daigaku hyakunen-shi*, vol. 8 (Sendai, 2004), 539-550.

reprinted after the war, he addressed this issue through a critique of the writer André Maurois (1885-1967), whose *Tragedy in France* (1940) had been translated into Japanese and became a bestseller during the war. Maurois blamed a Fifth Column of Communists and “a whole army of malcontents” who supported the Socialist Party for introducing chaos into France’s parliamentary system and causing France’s defeat.⁴⁹ Kuwabara countered that overconfidence in traditional humanist values – the values that anchored criticism of “Americanism” and “machine civilization” (*kikai bunmei*) – had made French intellectuals and Japanese Francophiles blind to the industrial progress of the United States and the Soviet Union.⁵⁰ Kuwabara was particularly critical of French travel-writing focused on those two countries. He argued that André Gide’s critical account of visiting Stalinist Russia in 1936 “used that country as a sheet of paper on which to diagram the problem of the human ego.”⁵¹ He concluded that the positive elements of humanism – its emphasis on freedom and human potential – would manifest themselves in the future, “but only having passed through their historical negation.”⁵² As in the case of France, Kuwabara believed that reckoning with Japan’s defeat had to entail – in language that evoked Löwith’s afterword – the total negation of traditional Japanese culture, rather than the return to “normalcy” desired by Japanese humanists.

⁴⁹ Andre Maurois, *Tragedy in France* (New York, 1940), 161-173.

⁵⁰ Kuwabara Takeo, *Kuwabara Takeo shū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1980), 650.

⁵¹ Kuwabara, “Gendai Furansu hūmanizumu” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1969), 68 (originally published in *Bunka no shōrai* in 1944).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 76.

Soon after the war ended, Kuwabara traveled around the Tōhoku region delivering lectures on the importance of the modern novel to postwar cultural reconstruction at the invitation of local associations and youth groups.⁵³ At the time, these groups were described as part of a wave of new “postwar cultural movements” (*sengo bunka undo*) that had spontaneously arisen out of a widespread desire to incorporate the lessons of Japan’s defeat at the local level during the US Occupation period. As the historian Kitazawa Kenzō has shown, the reality was more complex. Some postwar groups challenged the status-quo at the local level, while others were simply rebranded versions of patriotic associations that had been organized during the war.⁵⁴ Kuwabara’s experience lecturing at the behest of such associations was the immediate jumping off point for his postwar criticism.

Kuwabara encouraged his audience to read more novels and devote less time to traditional cultural pursuits. Yet most of the rural literary associations grouped together under the rubric of “postwar cultural movement” were in fact haiku poetry circles.⁵⁵ Members of these circles pushed back against the negative characterization of haiku conveyed by Kuwabara in his lectures. Kuwabara understood these interlocutors as arguing that the history of haiku, with its many accounts of poets reviving the art form by returning to the austere poetry of Bashō, provided a model for renovating Japanese culture and purging it of its wartime influences.⁵⁶ This model

⁵³ Kuwabara, *Kuwabara Takeo shū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1980), 611-612.

⁵⁴ Kitazawa Kenzō, *Sengo no shuppatsu: bunka undo, seinendan, sensō mibōjin* (Tokyo, 2000), 25-29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁶ For a contemporary critical account of Bashō revivalism, see Hori Tōru, *Haiku to chisei* (Tokyo, 1962), 77-83.

might make sense if one believed that the problem lay with the overt instrumentalization of traditional culture by supporters of the war, for example in the form of haiku poetry that celebrated the war effort. On the contrary, Kuwabara believed the problem lay in the relative insulation of the content of haiku from wartime influences, particularly in comparison with novels. Haiku poets participated in patriotic cultural associations that supported the war in large numbers, but this was not always reflected in the content of poems that adhered to traditional conventions governing the choice of subject matter.⁵⁷ Kuwabara believed that this allowed haiku poets to evade questions of war responsibility and postwar cultural reconstruction in comparison with their counterparts in the field of literature and other poetic genres. In other words, since novels and short stories incorporated patriotic messages and wartime themes in a more explicit way than much haiku, writers of prose fiction were compelled to reflect upon their actions during the war to a greater degree than haiku poets.⁵⁸

In late 1946, Kuwabara worked out a response to the objections to his critique of haiku in the form of an essay published in the journal *Seikai*, titled “Secondary Art: On Contemporary haiku” (Dai-ni geijutsu: Gendai haiku ni tsuite). It was the most famous piece of criticism he ever

⁵⁷ This comparison should imply that haiku poets did not also produce poems that were overtly supportive of the war effort. For a recent account of the relationship between major haiku poets and the war, see Tarumi Hiroshi, *Sensō haiku to haijintachi* (Tokyo, 2014).

⁵⁸ On the production of literature and poetry that celebrated the war effort, see Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan* (Oxford, 1981), 110-119.

produced.⁵⁹ In it, he advanced an “apples to oranges” comparison that brought poetic and literary forms together. After weighing the artistic value of terse haiku poetry against that of lengthy European novels, Kuwabara asserted that haiku and other traditional cultural practices were “secondary arts” (*dai-ni geijutsu*) that would impede the transformation of postwar Japan into a peaceful, democratic, and modern “cultural nation” (*bunka kokka*).

The essay – referred to as a “bombshell” in a major anthology of postwar literary debates – was not the first sweeping critique of traditional poetry to appear after the war, but it stood out for its refusal to couch its criticism in remorse for the recent past.⁶⁰ Commentators declared that it seemed to have been written by a foreign critic, a cheerful and confident outsider.⁶¹ In Kuwabara’s new role as a critic of postwar cultural movements, France now appeared in a more positive light, as a cultured nation where the masses respected artists, appreciated fine works of art, and did not assume that they could produce art as well as the professionals. In contrast, participation in amateur haiku circles encouraged people to think that “anyone could be an artist,” and such participation wasted time that would be better spent reading and discussing more intellectually challenging and socially-relevant products of culture, such as novels.⁶² Not unlike

⁵⁹ Kuwabara Takeo, “Dai-ni geijutsu” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo, 1968), 13 (originally published in *Sekai* in 1946).

⁶⁰ One might compare the tone of Kuwabara’s essay with the lament for fallen soldiers in Usui Yoshimi’s earlier critique of traditional tanka poetry. “Tenbō,” in Usui Yoshimi ed., *Sengo bungaku ronsō*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1972), 155-158.

⁶¹ Kōno Toshirō, “Kaidai, in *Sengo bungaku ronsō*, vol. 1, ed. Usui Yoshimi (Tokyo, 1972), 301.

⁶² Kuwabara, “Dai-ni geijutsu,” 27-28.

Theodor Adorno's (1903-1969) critique of "pseudo-democratic" jazz, Kuwabara criticized the formal limitations of haiku in order to bring it within the orbit of criticism directed at more vulgar expressions of mass culture.⁶³

In his postwar critique of haiku, Kuwabara developed a point he had first hinted at in his 1935 review of the Tessai exhibition. Namely, that the aesthetic concepts and standards associated with haiku had a negative influence on developments within other domains of Japanese culture. He believed this was true in spite of determined efforts to renovate the poetic form in the late nineteenth century, when influential practitioners of the art sought to transform it into an analogue to Western poetry that was simultaneously "modern" and "Japanese." Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), considered the father of modern haiku, experimented with new topics and extolled the virtues of individual poetic genius. In the process, he detached haiku from traditional practices associated with the communal production of poetry in the form of linked verse.⁶⁴

Kuwabara tried to show that Shiki's efforts to modernize haiku had failed.⁶⁵ He advanced his case by drawing on the work of the English critic I. A. Richards (1893-1979). In the 1920s, Richards sought to transform literary criticism into a more rigorous and empirical academic discipline by drawing on the techniques of experimental psychology. As a lecturer at Cambridge, he invited members of the audience to evaluate poems "blind," without any context that might be used as an aid to

⁶³ Theodor Adorno, "On Jazz," *Discourse* (Fall-Winter 1989-1990), 48-54.

⁶⁴ See the comparison between Shiki and Kuwabara in Robert Tuck, *Idly Rhyming Scribblers: Poetry, Print, and Community in Nineteenth Century Japan* (New York, 2018), 117-118.

⁶⁵ Kuwabara, "Dai-ni geijutsu," 22.

understanding. This entailed concealing the name of the poet and the date in which the poem was written. Richards then used the audience responses as the basis for his influential book on problems of literary analysis, *Practical Criticism* (1929).⁶⁶

Kuwabara was introduced to Richards's work by Doi Kōchi (1886-1979), a colleague at Tōhoku Imperial University who specialized in English literature and created a Japanese equivalent to Richards and Ogden's "BASIC English."⁶⁷ Inspired by Doi's enthusiasm for Richards, Kuwabara gathered poems for his own practical criticism experiment by borrowing back issues of haiku magazines from another colleague, Nagano Tametake (1910-1994), a biologist at the university who published several volumes of haiku poetry and criticism. In 1939 Nagano had published an essay in which he tried to refute the notion that science and the arts were "opposed to each other like magnetic poles." He argued that haiku composition and scientific research both required observational skill, sharp intuition, and the "plasticity" necessary to integrate details within a larger whole.⁶⁸ In his essay, Kuwabara dismissed such views as "completely misunderstanding the character of modern science."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy* (Cambridge, 2009), 69.

⁶⁷ Kuwabara Takeo, "Natsukashii Dōi-sensei" in *Kuwabara Takeo shū*, vol. 10 (Tokyo, 1981), 2-6.

⁶⁸ More playfully, Nagano proposed a new science of "Haiku-ology" that would study haiku as a lifeform (*seimei*). The field would be divided into two major research clusters ("dynamic" and "static") and seven different specialized sub-disciplines. Nagano Tametake, *Kagaku no ishō*, (Tokyo, 1947), 68-87.

⁶⁹ Kuwabara, "Dai-ni geijutsu," 28-29.

Kuwabara was not interested in the overlap among haiku, literature, and science at the level of technique nor at level of the subjective experience of creation. Following Richards' rigorous approach, his practical experiment focused on the final results of the creative process. He compiled a list of 15 haiku, with the authors and dates of composition hidden, and asked several students and colleagues at his university to (1) rank the poems from best to worst, (2) guess which of the poems were by famous poets, and (3) indicate whether or not they could tell which of the poems were composed by professionals and which were by amateurs. The results of this experiment showed that his subjects could not distinguish between amateurs and renowned masters of the art. Kuwabara argued that such results would have been inconceivable if, instead of haiku, he had compared short stories by amateurs and professionals. This proved that haiku was not a "true modern art" (shin no kindai geijutsu).⁷⁰

Exposing the formal limitations of haiku was a means to draw more attention to the institutions and social relationships at the foundation of literary culture. Kuwabara argued that the difficulty of ranking haiku on the basis of artistic merit meant that value was assigned to them on the basis of the prestige of the author within the world of established haiku poets (haidan). This included a consideration of the author's connections to prestigious magazines and haiku poetry circles (kessha) defined by traditional master and disciple relationships. Kuwabara argued that the influence of authorial prestige on artistic judgment would be inevitably greater in the case of haiku than in the case of the novels, because novels provided a stronger case for the possibility of objective criticism.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid., 14-18.

⁷¹ Ibid., 19-20.

The emphasis was on the word “possibility.” Kuwabara focused on the haiku establishment in this essay, but the Japanese literary establishment (*bundan*) had long been criticized for revolving around connections and prestige too. In 1935, the critic Itō Sei (1905-1969) had criticized this establishment as an insular guild, and Kuwabara had voiced similar criticisms as well in other essays.⁷² Yet Kuwabara criticized the literary establishment on the basis of the relative weakness of Japanese novels in comparison with European novels.⁷³ When the comparison turned to the literary establishment versus the haiku establishment, the former appeared to be a minor problem. Kuwabara argued that the relative weakness of Japanese novels was connected to the inconsistency of the critical standards applied to the literary establishment –understood to be relatively harsh owing to competition with translated literature – and the standards applied to the haiku establishment, which seemed to openly flaunt the principle of cultural meritocracy under the guise of tradition.⁷⁴ Without breaking down the barriers surrounding the “particularistic world” (*tokushu sekai*) of haiku, it would continue to exert a negative influence on the novel and other cultural forms. In other essays, Kuwabara tried to draw attention to the negative influence of traditional poetry on

⁷² Itō believed this guild-like arrangement had positive aspects as well. For example, the *bundan* establishment was conducive to the emergence of a tight-knit community that could convey advice and criticism to writers that would be difficult to communicate in a more impersonal public forum. Itō Sei, *Itō Sei zenshū*, vol. 13 (Tokyo, 1973), 388-390.

⁷³ Kuwabara Takeo, “Nihon gendai shōsetsu no jakuten” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol.1 (Tokyo, 1968), 239-240 (originally published in *Ningen* in Feb. 1946).

⁷⁴ To make this point, Kuwabara pointed to an advertisement for a haiku composition course that promoted the fact that the instructor was the son of a major poet. Kuwabara, “Dai-ni geijutsu,” 20

Japanese prose. He noted, for example, that the Communist writer Miyamoto Yuriko's (1899-1951) otherwise well done, socially engaged writing was marred by haiku-esque passages that expressed aesthetic values at odds with the progressive political messages her prose conveyed.⁷⁵

In one of many inflammatory passages in his essay, Kuwabara suggested that composing haiku was an appropriate pastime for “bedridden patients and the elderly.” Passages like this were quoted over and over in the thunderous critical response to the original essay, which apparently took the author by surprise. In an allusion to classical Chinese literature, he later recalled that he was sent enough books, journals, and poetry magazines to “reach the rafters and make a pack-ox sweat.”⁷⁶ They carried critical responses – serious, dismissive, conciliatory, angry – to his haiku piece. A cartoonist even produced a satirical “nautical map” of the world of literary criticism for the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper in 1951 that included a geographical feature named after Kuwabara's essay.

The Strait of Secondary Art

Also known by the name “The Strait of Part-Time Professors.” A narrow waterway between University Cape and the mainland literary establishment (*bundan*). Small indecisive rocky outcroppings lie scattered about in pretentious poses that annoy voyagers. Secondary criticism was born out of Professor Kuwabara Takeo's “Theory of haiku as a Secondary Art.” Whether

⁷⁵ Kuwabara Takeo, “Sengo no Miyamoto Yuriko” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1968) 502 (originally published in *Chūō Kōron* in April 1949).

⁷⁶ Kuwabara Takeo, *Kuwabara Takeo shū* vol. 2 (Tokyo, 1980), 621-623.

haiku is a secondary art or not is still unclear, but there's little doubt about the fact that Professor Kuwabara's part-time criticism is purely secondary.⁷⁷

Kuwabara's argument angered many haiku poets. The critic and literary historian Matsui Toshihiko later suggested that many poets were under the sway of an "apocalyptic mindset" at the beginning of the US Occupation, and they feared that haiku would be wiped out by an onrush of American influence. Kuwabara's essay added fuel to these flames, and the initial response to his argument was overwhelmingly negative.⁷⁸ Yet the essay's medium-term impact on the field was more complex. Its appearance in 1946 was soon incorporated into new histories of haiku and tanka, where it was ritualistically invoked – and criticized – to mark a postwar turning point toward greater social and political engagement among practitioners of the art. The postwar turn in these historical narratives essay served as a counter-argument to his assertion that haiku was forever condemned to secondary status.⁷⁹ Yet this characterization of the essay's influence by contemporary chroniclers involved a degree of wishful thinking. It was widely read among poets, and it did influence a small avant-garde that played a significant role in progressive postwar

⁷⁷ Yamato Tarō, "Bundan hihyōka kaizu" *Yomiuri Shinbun* (June 25, 1951), 4.

⁷⁸ Matsui Toshiko, *Kindai haion-shi* (Tokyo, 1965), 526-554.

⁷⁹ See the list in Tsubouchi Toshinori, *Mōroku haiku masumasu sakan* (Tokyo, 2009), 112. This is also how Kuwabara makes his few appearances in the existing English-language literary scholarship. For an example, see Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West* (New York, 1999), 169-171.

histories of haiku, but the reaction of most major poets, whose influence outlasted waves of postwar experimentation, ranged from silence to hostility.⁸⁰

For example, the influential poet Nakamura Kusatao (1901-1983) redirected Kuwabara's argument about haiku contaminating other fields of culture back upon him. He argued that the real negative influence on Japanese culture was not haiku, it was the university. Kuwabara's essay was the manifestation of a serious and widespread sickness, "professoritis" (kyōjubyō). Those suffering from professoritis understood the various domains of culture in a merely "intellectual" way inadequate to the requirements of good criticism. Kuwabara had dismissed the possible objection that he was unqualified to criticize haiku because he did not compose it, noting that similar objections were not raised of movie critics. This did not satisfy Kusatao, who asserted that one required a 10-year apprenticeship in order to even begin to understand haiku. Finally, he argued that those in the advanced stages of "professoritis" forget that they are even Japanese, and this impeded their ability to grasp Japanese culture in either a critical or affirmative sense.⁸¹

Outside the haiku field, Kusatao's critique was not far from the position of Leftist critics concerned with the class origins of culture. They emphasized the links between haiku, Kabuki, and traditional forms of song and dance with the history of the common people. These critics accused Kuwabara of elitism and pointed to the robust culture of amateur haiku poetry circles as evidence of the

⁸⁰ Tsubouchi Toshinori, *Mōroku haiku masumasu sakan*, 114-159. Tsubouchi suggests that the views of the major poets who dismissed Kuwabara ultimately outlasted those who responded to him by trying to take Haiku in a socially-engaged direction.

⁸¹ Akagi Sakae, *Sengo haiku ronsō-shi* (Tokyo, 1990), 20-22.

democratic appeal of this traditional art form in Japan. As opposition grew between the Left and US Occupation authorities toward the end of the 1940s, they argued that grassroots expressions of traditional culture, incubated within circles of amateur enthusiasts, could be politicized and become sites of resistance against the cultural imperialism of the United States.⁸²

Kuwabara insisted however that no matter how popular such amateur circles became, to call the works they produced “art” impeded the spread of a rigorous and socially aware literary consciousness, and it ensured the low status of professional artists, authors, and the humanistic disciplines. The only difference between amateurs and professionals would be that professionals had the leisure, resources, and connections to devote more time to the production of poetry than the amateurs. Kuwabara believed that amateur haiku culture was less an expression of poetic democracy than it was a rejection of literary meritocracy. He illustrated this meritocracy by way of a comparison with France. As he put it, “Provided you have lived in France, you likely know the extent to which the word *écrivain* is pronounced by people with respect. The people appreciate the arts, but they do not think art can be easily created. How are things in Japan? The scarcity of great artists causes art to be looked down upon, but the influence of a genre like haiku, capable of being produced by anyone, is also a factor.”⁸³ Kuwabara selectively invoked France as part of a normative critique of postwar

⁸² See for example Rironsha henshūbu ed., *Kokumin bungaku geijutsu undo no riron* (Tokyo, 1954) and Rekishigaku kenkyūkai ed., *Minzoku no bunka nit suite* (Tokyo, 1953). Kuwabara discusses Left-wing criticism of his argument in Kuwabara Takeo, “Dentō to kindai” in *Kuwabara Takeo zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo, 1968), 392-396 (Originally published in Iwanami’s *Gendai Shisō*, vol. 11, in 1957).

⁸³ Kuwabara, “Dai-ni geijutsu,” 28.

cultural movements and government slogans that declared a stark break with the past, yet remained inextricably entangled in it at a practical level.

The blueprint for Kuwabara's own call to break from the past was modeled on the sweeping critique that he had made of French humanism in 1944, which in turn derived inspiration from Löwith's totalizing criticism of European and Japanese culture. This came through clearly in one of Kuwabara's few direct responses to criticism of his "secondary art" essay. The critic in this case was Yamaguchi Seishi (1901-1994), a major poet who had led a movement in the 1930s to break from the convention – criticized by Kuwabara – that true haiku must contain seasonal words (*kigo*). Unlike Kusatao, Seishi broadly sympathized with Kuwabara's critique, construing it however as mainly concerned with the vulgarization of haiku by the masses. He argued that while amateurs endlessly imitated haiku by Bashō and other well-known poets, one had to acknowledge the greatness of the poets who produced the work that was endlessly imitated in the present day. For Seishi, the way forward was to continue to produce new, original work that broke with the conventional models imitated by the masses, as he had tried to do so in his movement to create "non-seasonal" haiku poetry that addressed modern-day concerns.⁸⁴ In 1947 Kuwabara responded that, while Seishi was concerned with the future of haiku, he was an outsider to the haiku field concerned with the fate of Japanese culture as a whole. In Kuwabara's view, it was impossible to separate out the good intentions of reformist professionals like Seishi from the actual practice of masses.⁸⁵ Here Kuwabara reaffirmed his commitment to produce a totalizing, rather than partial or

⁸⁴ Yamaguchi Seishi, "Ōfuku shokan" in *Gendai haiku no tame ni*, edited by Yamazaki Kiyoshi (Tokyo, 1947), 1-3.

⁸⁵ Kuwabara Takeo, "Yamaguchi Seishi-shi ni" in *Gendai Nihon bunka no hansei*, (Tokyo, 1947), 90-93.

reformist, critique of Japanese culture, a commitment that drew encouragement from Löwith's wartime critique of the "two-story house."

Across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the commercialization and professionalization of literary and cultural criticism created a latent demand for creative comparisons across increasingly specialized and differentiated academic and cultural spheres. The voluminous response to Kuwabara's "secondary art" essay attested to this. Provocative comparisons provided a means of engaging in a broad, holistic debate about the social role of art and literature across the divisions that bifurcated the world of cultural production across Eastern and Western lines. After the war, Kuwabara powerfully reasserted long-standing assumptions about the relative superiority of the "Western track" of Japan's dual track system of cultural production, and in doing so, he drew haiku poets into a heated discussion of the social responsibility of intellectuals.

Intellectuals who, like Kuwabara, sought to bridge the gap between the cultural marketplace and the university viewed their object of study through a doubled lens. There was the image of China or France or United States that circulated within Japan – a product of an unsystematic approach to translation, comparison, importation, and exchange, buffeted by shifting pragmatic concerns, literary trends, political propaganda, and the proclivities of the Japanese public – and the China or France or United States they were expected to immerse themselves in, often through the experience of studying abroad, as part of their academic careers. Kuwabara's comparative practice is a window onto the relationship between Japanese intellectuals and the wider world as mediated by this doubled lens. From early on in his career, Kuwabara engaged in debate across increasingly specialized fields of cultural criticism, and this entailed criticizing idealizations of Chinese aesthetics, Japanese tradition, and French literary culture from a standpoint grounded in experience. French culture

appeared in a much more positive light in his postwar writings however, which were aimed at encouraging efforts to transform Japanese culture after the war. These writings made Kuwabara a major intellectual, but they were also highly controversial.

Kuwabara's most influential writing came in the form of provocative essays directed at specific intellectual and political contexts rather than systematic treatises. Though he was among the most prominent of cultural critics during his lifetime, his work has attracted little attention from historians since his death in 1988. It is the author's hope that focusing on the subtleties of Kuwabara's comparative practice – seen here in connection with the problematic of Löwith's “two-story house” – has elicited a new rationale for scholars of literature and intellectual history to revisit his work today. This work demonstrates that comparisons did more than merely affirm or criticize Japanese culture in relation to the West. Indeed, even when comparisons reinforced such binaristic ways of thinking, the comparative imagination provided a means to transcend and disrupt the specialized disciplinary, generic, and cultural categories that undergirded intellectual discussion and debate. A truly global intellectual history will account for this as one among many different roles played by comparison in intellectual life.